

**THE TRINITY**  
**Scripture, Structures and Limits**

by  
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**A Paper Submitted to Dr. Colin Brown**  
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I have two contentions regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. The first is that the doctrine of the Trinity is inextricably tied to the revelation of God given in the scriptures. That is, it was formulated after the closing of the Canon of Scripture in order to bring an understanding to how the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ and the monotheistic nature of God's being, which are both confessed to by the Biblical writers, work together. The second contention is that because of the literary nature of the scriptures, that is the intent of the original authors and the scope or focus of their concerns, any statement made in reference to the Trinity must be made in a limited fashion as a "model" looking towards aiding our understanding of the Nature of the Triune God of the Christian scriptures. These two contentions work together in somewhat of a circular fashion.

## THE TRINITY AND SCRIPTURE

Our beliefs, with regard to matters with which we are not directly acquainted, e.g., the facts of the Gospel story, are grounded not on the mental picture which we form of them, and which is usually erroneous, but on general or abstract ideas. But our belief in the Trinity, our belief in God, cannot be based on any "general idea."<sup>1</sup>

That there is a relationship between the concept of the Trinity and the Canon of Scripture should be obvious, that the relationship is exclusive is not so obvious. I find the basis for such an exclusive relationship between scripture and the

Trinity in the inability of the Natural or General Revelation to produce an example of Trinity in Nature. Try as they might, the Church Fathers, particularly Tertullian and Augustine, successfully illustrate "three-ness" or "one-ness" but not "one-in-three-ness and simultaneously three-in-one-ness."<sup>2</sup> Thus, we are left with just the testimony of Scripture. To be fair to Tertullian and those that followed, they were working with the premise that the Nature of God's Being should be found imprinted in the Nature of Creation, Vestigia Trinitatis. Where they made a mistake, I think, is in the type of examples that they looked for.<sup>3</sup>

Working from his Dialectical heritage, Barth began his theology along the opposite philosophic premise that if God is revealed at all then he must be a Trinity because his Otherness would restrict him from disclosing himself if he were "non-trinitarian."<sup>4</sup> Barth's model runs parallel to his three-fold understanding of the Word of God. Because of the revelation of God in Scripture (The existence of the Word of God in the light of God's Otherness) he views the Trinity as "Revealed, Revelation and Revealedness."<sup>5</sup> In some ways this model tends to echo Augustine's "Love, Lover and Beloved."<sup>6</sup>

The point of all this is that regardless of one's perspective, there would be no Trinity or basis for a trinitarian understanding of the Nature of God without first recognizing that its foundation is in the revelation of God found in the scriptures. But what is this revelation of God? In the first instance it is not, "Thus sayeth the Lord God, 'I am Trinity, and you shall worship as such.'" Unfortunately there are no passages



in Scripture that say that. Thus, while Augustine would rather we didn't base our understanding of the Trinity on a "general idea," that is exactly what we have in scripture.

This leads us to the question, "Why the Trinity at all? Why not monarchianism or modalism, et al?" The center of the controversy is to be found in ones understanding of Christology, specifically the Incarnation of God in Christ.

## THE INCARNATION

It appears that in the New Testament there are clear elements for a doctrine of the Trinity. There is a commitment to the unity of God as in the Old Testament, albeit with some modifications of the way in which God is thought to have been revealed; there is a development of a considerable christological tradition and there are some important suggestions of an understanding of the Holy Spirit as revealing the presence of God. However we do not have in precise terms a conscious discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity as an issue.

One cannot discuss the Trinity without also discussing the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Incarnation seems to be with us from the moment we first turn to the pages of the New Testament in the Nativity Narrative of Matthew's gospel.

"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:20b-23)

Yet before I go off and begin citing various passages that seem

to reflect the full divine nature of Christ ("See, it's right there in black and white, 'Thus sayeth the Lord God . . .") I need to acknowledge the significance that the terms may have had for the original first century (in this case, Jewish) hearers and thus attempt to suppress for a moment my twentieth century bias with its fully developed christology and homogenized monotheism.

The titles addressed to Jesus of Nazareth, for example, may seem to have significant value to us in so far as they "reveal" Jesus' divinity, but to those who lived prior to the council of Nicea their significance may have had nothing to do with Eternal Realities but with a hope and a belief in a man of whom it was said would come some day and set them free.<sup>8</sup> This aspect of the question must not be taken too lightly. I must face the reality that in addressing the question of the Incarnation of God in Christ (and the doctrine of the Trinity) I am attempting to put into precise rational words what the biblical writers left in non-technical pictorial language.<sup>9</sup> Hugo Meynell writes in defense of the obvious gap between the concepts presented by the Church Fathers and the language used by the Biblical writers as being brought about by the need to adapt Christianity to other cultures and, more importantly, the development of Socratic logic and reflection:

As a result of such reflection what was originally expressed in a dramatic and poetic ways is progressively able to be stated in a more and more exact and rigorous manner, by use of the kind of technical terminology which is most familiar to us from the natural sciences.<sup>10</sup>

## CHRISTOLOGY AND THE EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Rather than making a brief survey of the various texts of scripture that are normally cited to establish Christ's divinity (and therefore the Trinity), I would like to turn to an article by Christopher B. Kaiser entitled "The Discernment of Triunity."<sup>11</sup> In this article he develops a Christology that is based on the testimony of scripture and the "empirical-phenomenological" approach. His application of this approach appeals to me because, on the one hand, he's using a method that reflects a development made in religious studies over the last half century and, on the other hand, he's intelligently dealing with the written record of scripture. Briefly, the empirical-phenomenological approach involves establishing on an empirical "grounding" (historically verifiable event) an encounter with the Holy (a numinous-sacred presence).<sup>12</sup> The challenge for Kaiser is that, among other things, he must establish that the numinous-encounter in Jesus was definitive of Jesus' life-time existence (and thus establish a trinitarian model as opposed to the "adoption" or "inspiration" explanations for the phenomenon).

After searching for the proper grounding of his thesis, Kaiser bases his findings on the prayer/personal relationship between the Father and the Son and upon the miraculous phenomenon surrounding Jesus' ministry.

I find that the prayer life of Jesus, as observed by the disciples and the early Church, is a suitable empirical basis for the apostolic discernment of triunity and that it is possible to analyze the rather complex nature of this discernment into the following elements (in spite of the fact that they are organically inter-

related, they are logically distinct):

- (1) The presence of God discerned in Jesus (miracles, prophetic teachings, etc.).
- (2) This presence discerned to be continual and irrevocable (everyday life, suffering, death).
- (3) This presence discerned to be immediate and 'personal' (revision of law, healing on Sabbath, forgiving sins); together with (2) implies 'Incarnation', 'God with us'.
- (4) This presence discerned in continual conjunction with the distinct personal presence of God-the-Father (prayers of Jesus, 'responses' of the Father); implies two distinct divine 'persons'.
- (5) These two divine presences discerned to be reciprocally related, 'coinherent' (intimacy of prayer, Jesus' use of 'Abba'); implies two 'persons' in one God (John 14:11, 10:30).
- (6) Discernment of these divine presences discerned to be due to divine 'inspiration', presence of Holy Spirit in the Church itself (1 Cor 12:3).
- (7) Presence of the Spirit discerned to be continual, immediate, and intimately related to apprehension of God as 'Father' and Jesus as his 'Son' (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6); implies three, and only three, 'coinhering', divine persons, one God."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, although I've gone about it in a round-about way, we are left with an understanding that the doctrine of the Trinity is inextricably tied to the revelation of God given in the scriptures.

## STRUCTURES AND LIMITS

To repeat my second contention: because of the literary nature of the scriptures, that is the intent of the original authors and the scope or focus of their concerns, any statement made in reference to the Trinity must be made in a limited fashion as a "model" looking towards aiding our understanding of

the Nature of the Triune God of the Christian scriptures.

To the systematic or logical mind a preliminary reading of the Scriptures should reveal a naggingly consistent trajectory towards open-endedness in terms of definitive doctrinal statements. Undaunted, such a mind might respond that this is because people today are asking different questions than they were during the Apostolic period. This is a good response. It is a far better response than the one made by those that completely ignore the discrepancy and either go about answering questions that no one is asking or rero-tilling the scriptural record to fight their vision of Reality. But the question still remains for both of them: Why is there such an Open-endedness to Scripture? Just about every major doctrine has some elements of Open-endedness in it; whether it be the doctrine of Election, or the Sovereignty of God, or the Inspiration of the Scriptures, or Kingdom of Heaven/God, or the Triune Nature of the Godhead. This question points us in two directions. The first is the nature of structures and the second, which is very closely related to the first, is the nature of our "knowing" things.

There seems to be a nasty tendency among Christian to see structures as Realities and not Utilities. This tendency can be seen from Augustine on down the line, and is an obvious throw back to the Platonic notion that beyond all phenomenon is the Perfect/Ideal Reality. Thus, Christians often see the doctrine (or doctrinal statement) as the Reality and the phenomenon as the Image. All seems well and good until our beloved Open-endedness comes along and presents an overwhelming number of exceptions to our newly devised rules, forcing us, we think, to either give up

our Reality (the doctrine) or the phenomenon (the Image). This would not be a dilemma if we understood that structure is a construct of our own mind, devised to aid our understanding of the corresponding Reality. This is why I use the word "model" when referring to the doctrine of the Trinity. Because there is no scripture that explicitly declares, "Behold, I am Trinity, and I am Trinity in this manner . . ."; because the doctrine is a synthesis of the foundational Old Testament Monotheism and the heavenly vision of God incarnate in Christ, it is something that our minds have put together to aid us in understanding how God could be one and at the same time three.

The second direction is in terms of how we "know" things. As was once pointed out in class, our knowledge is a collection of approximations. "We are used to giving objective absolute certainties on things, but life isn't that way; it presents good approximations but not objective absolute certainties."<sup>14</sup> Again, in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, we have a model of the Inner Being of the Godhead and not a photograph or family portrait of the Father, Son & Holy Ghost. We live with this sort of approximation in every area of our lives and so it should not come as a surprise that,

Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face  
to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know  
even as also I am known. And now abideth faith,  
hope and love, these three; but the greatest of  
these is love. (1st Corinthians 13:12, 13).

It's a typical day for the man of steel  
a little bit happy and little bit sad  
That seems like a reasonable way to feel  
for a man in a world gone mad . . .

'Cause there's a poor man begging for a crust of bread  
on a hard mean street downtown  
And there's a rich woman sewing with golden thread  
on the train of her wedding gown

And the man of steel has a tear in his eye for the homeless one  
And the man of steel has a lump in his throat for the  
owner of love  
And the man of steel has hope in his heart for anyone  
who will see both sides and still decide to carry on . . .

And the man of steel has hope in his heart for anyone  
Who will sing a clear and truthful song  
Who can hear a lie and still be strong  
Who can see both sides and still decide to carry on<sup>15</sup>

*the essay is a little  
good written but a little  
But suffers from too much  
- some late  
- being in final*

*15  
- 10 late  
15/30*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Augustine: Later Works, "The Trinity," Library of Christian Classics: Ichthus Edition, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Augustine, pp. 38ff and Class notes: Dr. Colin Brown, Systematic Theology I, Fuller Theological Seminary, May 16, 1985.

<sup>3</sup>One of the concepts that Augustine develops is based on 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:16; he sees the Trinity as "Love, Lover and Beloved." I feel that up to this point Augustine presents some real insight into the Nature of God. There is a Subject/Object nature to Love that requires relationship or communion. So that for God to be love, he must also be in communion with the Object of his Love, and thus it follows that there is a plurality, a trinity to God. Augustine's mistake is that he then attempts to identify the "Love, Lover & Beloved," attempting to discern a one-for-one correspondence between the Trinity and the "Love, Lover, Beloved" analogy. He goes from the concept of communion within the Godhead (something that is immanent in God) to dividing God into three roles (something functional, "economic"), and the image gets lost in a pile of disjointed metaphors. Augustine, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>Carl Barth, Church Dogmatics, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I, pp. 297ff.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, p. 295.

<sup>6</sup>Augustine, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup>Bruce N. Kaye, "The New Testament," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), pp. 22-23.

<sup>8</sup>Further reading on Christology and the titles for Christ see: C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 228-285; Peter Ellis, Matthew: His Mind and His Message (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974), pp. 101-112; Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1981), pp. 235-407.

<sup>9</sup>That the Bible is written in non-technical pictorial language is certainly part of a larger discussion than can be adequately addressed here (one then wonders about the logic of addressing the question of the Trinity . . .). It's not even a question of precision or style but one of the ever elusive intent. An interesting book dealing with the literary nature of the Scriptures is: Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981).



<sup>10</sup>Hugo Meynell, "Bernard Lonergan," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), p. 96.

<sup>11</sup>Christopher B. Kaiser, "The Discernment of Triunity," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), pp. 27-41.

<sup>12</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). Kaiser's face-lift of mysterium tremendum et fascinans is a heartwarming reminder of one of the classes that I took as a Religious Studies major at Loyola Marymount University. Ah . . . nothing like applying my personal (Reformational) encounter with Christ to the old Jesuit musings about the Holy. Class notes: Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.

<sup>13</sup>Kaiser, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup>Class notes: Dr. Colin Brown, Systematic Theology I, Fuller Theological Seminary, April 11, 1985.

<sup>15</sup>Pat Terry, "Man of Steel," The Silence (Waco, Texas: Word Music, 1984).

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Terry, Pat. "Man of Steel," The Silence. Waco, Texas: Word Music, 1984.

## THE TRINITY

### [ATTEMPT A STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY FOR TODAY]

STATEMENT: The Trinity is a doctrine pertaining to the Triune Being or Nature of the God of the Christian Scriptures that was set forth during the Patristic Period (100-300 A.D.) of the Church. It is my contention that this doctrine must be understood in terms of its origin in the Bible, specifically the New Testament documents (that is regarding the limited scope of the New Testament's "theologically systematic precision," and must be seen as a model or symbol of the Inner Being of God.

### THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY [QUOTE, notes p 3]

A) The Trinity and the New Testament- no NT, no Trinity.

B) NT testimony:

- 1) Monotheism
- 2) Christology
- 3) The Holy Spirit

### BIBLICAL LANGUAGE & THE NATURE OF THE SCRIPTURES

non-technical [QUOTE, notes p 5]

open-endedness (seed-idea to be developed but with Scripture as the sole evidence there's definitely a limity to the construct to be erected).

### TRINITY AS MODEL OR SYMBOL:

#### DEFINITIONS

#### PROBLEMS

#### REPLIES

#### CONCLUSIONS

## THE TRINITY

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~~TRINITY AND~~ THE SCRIPTURES: + Biblical language -  
Nature & time

TRINITY AS MODEL OR SYMBOL:

DEFINITIONS

PROBLEMS

REPLIES

CONCLUSIONS

- testimony → New Test. → trinity w/out/no Trinity  
- language → intent, limit, seed-idea  
- open-ended nature to Scripture  
→ develop, but w/ Scripture as  
the evidence there's a definite  
limit to the constructs to be devised

Model or Symbol  
Factors → inner relatedness  
→ degrees of Godness

We believe in One God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things visible and invisible;  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all worlds,  
that is, of the substance of the Father,  
Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance (consubstantial) with the Father;  
by whom all things were made,  
both those in the heavens and those on earth;  
who for us men, and for our salvation,  
came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man;  
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,  
and suffered, and was buried;  
and the third day He rose again,  
according to the Scriptures;  
and ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;  
and he shall come again, with glory,  
to judge the quick and the dead;  
of whose kingdom shall be no end;  
And in the Holy Ghost,  
the Lord, and Giver of life,  
who proceedeth from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son  
together is worshipped and glorified,  
who spake by the Prophets;  
in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;  
we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sin;  
and we look for the resurrection of the dead;  
and the life of the world to come.  
-Amen. @

@ Phillip Schaff, ed., Creed of Christendom, "Two Creeds of Epiphanius, First Formula," volume II, pp. 33, 34.

As a young Roman Catholic during the era of Vatican II and many years later as a Presbyterian who was attempting to bring together the personal experiences of conversion and renewal and the historical realities of what had brought about the Present, I recited the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed, a statement left by a remote generation in their effort to stem a heretical tide that threatened to inundate their experience of faith and the testimony of Scripture. T

#### THE CENTRAL NATURE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AND THE INACCESSIBILITY OF ITS UNDERSTANDING

The Bible and the Trinity . . . Thoughts that lean toward Lindsell and Schaeffer but focused on authority and no inerrancy. No NT, No Trinity. What the NT (i.e., Bible) does and does not say about the Nature of God and the Trinity specifically.

"Systems," mental constructs and dealing with Reality . . . The NT writers tended to leave alot of loose ends (eg., Predestination and Freewill, et al), why doesn't someone develop a Theology of the Open-endedness of the Bible (theologies have been developed with less . . . ).

#### MISC. NOTES

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FROM ONE GOD IN TRINITY (Toon, Peter and James D. Spiceland, eds., Cornerstone Books: Westchester, Illinois, 1980).

#### CHAPTER 1: "The Meaning of the Trinity" (Roger Nicole)

- (1) One and only one God,
- (2) God eternally exists in 3 distinct "persons",
- (3) They are fully equal in every divine perfection---possess the fullness of the divine essence.

RECIPORACAL HERESIES (when one of the above propositions is abandoned the following Heresies result):

- (A) MODALISM,
- (B) SUBORDINATIONISM,
- (C) TRITHEISM.

"It is imporatat to recognise that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery. It is not, however, an absurdity, as some people have viewed it. Specifically, it is not asserted that God is one in the same respect in which he is three. What is



propounded is that there is unity of essence, that this one essence is shared/ alike by each of the three persons, and that the three are conjoined in a total harmony of will and being, which far surpasses the unity observed between distinct individuals in humanity." pp.4/5

Unique, no physical parallel, water, etc. Picture=modalism communion/inner working of the Godhead---sense of mutuality within his own being. Picture of reality---> 3 dimensional space (but with personality), quoting Nathan R. Wood, The Secrets of the Universe (Revell, NY, '32).

## CHAPTER 2: "The New Testament" (Bruce N. Kaye)

### I. THE ELEMENTS OF THE QUESTION

" . . . In the case of the New Testament these elements resolve themselves into three questions. **First of all**, how far the writers take over the belief of the Old Testament in one God; that is, to what extent there is continuity and/or discontinuity with the view of God in the Old Testament? **Secondly**, there is the question of the position of Christ; how far is he already seen as divine and how is that related to the view of God in the Old Testament? **And, thirdly**, there is the question of the place of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant in contrast to the old covenant." (p 11)

- (1) Continuity with the doctrine of the one God of the old Testament--and discontinuity.
- (2) Christology.
- (3) Holy Spirit.

### II. THE OVERALL ISSUE OF THE TRINITY

" . . . it appears that in the New Testament there are clear elements for a doctrine of the Trinity. There is a commitment to the unity of God as in the Old Testament, albeit with some modifications of the way in which God is thought to have been revealed; there is a development of a considerable christological tradition and there are some important suggestions of an understanding of the Holy Spirit as revealing the presence of God. However we do not have in precise terms a conscious discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity as an issue." (p 22, 23).

### III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Professor Wiles . . . argues that doctrinal arguments were influenced by two very large prior factors: prayer, or christian piety in relation to Jesus, and soteriology, the principle that Jesus saves and saves effectively. (p. 23)

#### . . . FURTHER POINTS (3):

1. There is the question of how a doctrine of the Trinity might be related to a commitment to the authority of the New Testament in doctrinal discussion and formulation.
2. Jesus' commitment to the idea that he was fulfilling the hopes of Israel, while at the same time revealing something new and different, raises the question of how the Old Testament is to



be interpreted.

3. the argument I have outlined above in regard to Jesus' own authority, and his person in relation to christology, raises immediately the question of how far the New Testament ought to be regarded in christological discussion as evidence for the historical Jesus.

#### CHAPTER 3: "The Discernment of Triunity." (Christopher B. Kaiser).

"... To summarise the results of our investigation: I find that the prayer life of Jesus, as observed by the disciples and the early Church, is a suitable empirical basis for the apostolic discernment of Triunity and that it is possible to analyse the rather complex nature of this discernment into the following elements (in spite of the fact that they are organically inter-related, they are logically distinct):

- (1) The presence of God discerned in Jesus (miracles, prophetic teachings, etc.).
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- (7) Presence of the Spirit discerned to be continual, immediate, and intimately related to apprehension of God as 'Father' and Jesus as his 'Son' (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6); implies three, and only three, 'coinhering', divine persons, one God." (p 37).

#### CHAPTER 4: "The Patrist Dogma" (Gerald Lewis Bray)

"Current debate about the Trinity has largely gravitated from a detailed analysis of the person and work of the Godhead to starker, more fundamental questions. Does the framework of classical trinitarianism hold good for today? Can it be called 'biblical', and if so, in what sense? Is it binding on a culture which has rejected the thought-forms of ancient philosophy?

"Our difficulties are made worse by serious problems of definition. What exactly do we mean when we speak of patristic trinitarian dogma? Even more problematic, how are we to understand the concept of validity in this context? Do we mean that the dogma must be in conformity to scriptural teaching, that it must be internally consistent, that it must be relevant for



the present day, or is it some combination of these? It may seem pedantic to retreat to definitions of basic vocabulary, but there can be no doubt that much modern discussion has suffered from a failure either to define its terms with sufficient precision, or to appreciate the true significance of the context in which the traditional framework was elaborated." (p 42)

#### I. DOGMATISM

"... Broadly speaking, Dunn follows the theories of Walter Bauer and Ernst Kasemann, both of whom hold that primitive Christianity was a charismatic movement which only gradually hardened into the confessionalism which we call orthodoxy, or early Catholicism. . . . Gratuitous assumptions of this kind are matched only by Dunn's failure to come to terms with Luke-Acts, which he regards as a paradoxical combination of charisma and confession. How this paradox occurred in a Church which was supposedly being torn into opposing camps along these lines, Dunn is unable to explain. The obvious answer is that such a division is unworkable; charisma and confession belong together at the heart of the Church's faith, and have developed together from the very beginning. . . . The biblical writers were not trying to be systematic theologians, although they were clearly happy to make propositional statements about God and his activity in Jesus Christ." (pp 44, 45)

#### II. ADAPTATION OR EVOLUTION

### CHAPTER 5: "The Filioque Clause" (Alasdair Heron)

#### I. THE INCLUSION OF THE CLAUSE IN THE NICENE CREED

#### II. THREE CENTRAL ISSUES

1. The Filioque and Scripture
2. The Expansion of the Creed
3. The Filioque and the Doctrine of the Trinity

#### III. THE MODERN DISCUSSION

### CHAPTER 6: "Karl Barth" (Richard Roberts)

#### I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Centrality of the Doctrine to Christianity . . .

"... It is the point of derivation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the single (yet temporally extended and recurrent) act of God in revelation which dictates the fundamental commitment to the principle of unity in the trinitarian thought of the Church Dogmatics." (p 84)

Revelation & Trinity & claims of Christomonism.

"... The function of the Trinity is revelation; content of revelation is the disclosure of the Lordship of the one God." (85)

"... The derivation of creation and createdness from the equation of Creator and Father in the context of the Trinity means that once more the latter does not remain so much a mystery transcending human rationality as an ontological battle-ground whose strife is muted by a suppression of incompatibles." (p 88)



## II. THE TRINITY AND THE STRUCTURE OF CHURCH DOGMATICS

"... The events of the life of Jesus Christ are the sole medium of revelation and in virtue of the trinity are an capacity in antecedence and reciprocity the completeness of revelation of Father, Creator and Lord is guaranteed." (p 90)

"... The point of focus of peity has thus shifted uneasily from the primal unity of God to Christ, from Father to Son and even to Spirit. This unease is expressed in recent controversy because without an adequate doctrine of the Trinity, and awareness of the need for it, the orientation of christian worship and theological understanding alights upon one aspect and interprets the whole in light of one mode.

"The difficulties in Barth's doctrine of the Trinity must not be allowed to obscure the fact that in the Church Dogmatics he draws this conception back into the realm of theological import and thereby he challenges an environment interpreted largely through the monocular anti-dogmatic and anti-trinitarian perspective of the practitioners of the historical-critical method. His treatment of the Trinity is grandiose, yet as has been seen genetically suspect, because of the mode of derivation dictated by the difficulties of generating any doctrine of revelation in the present age. Nevertheless despite these difficulties, which find expression in deep tensions, distortions and ambiguities throughout the Church Dogmatics, Barth forces the theologically-concerned reader to consider a basic question. Is there a God to whom the New Testament witnesses? Has he revealed himself in Jesus Christ and does he continue to reveal himself in the Church in concert with the Holy Spirit or are we, in the words of T.F. Torrance, left with a mere word-play, the unprofessional, arbitrary theological jottings of the primitive churches? For Barth, if God is, then he is God in Trinity and not otherwise. . . . The painful dilemma that faces us is this: without the Trinity we have no basis for the unity and continuity of Christianity with the tradition of Israel and its monotheism and we should revert to Judaism and dispense finally with the divinity of Christ. With the doctrine of the Trinity in its Barthian form the danger of an inward reduction into a christological exclusivity is only held off by assertion. Clearly the former is only acceptable if unconditional surrender is the order of the day, and the latter must therefore be regarded as provisionally important even as Barth would wish it to be. Barth must be taken seriously because he recommences the serious theological game; but he must be understood in order to be surpassed." (pp 92-93)

### CHAPTER 7: "Bernard Lonergan" (Hugo Meynell)

#### I. THE APPROACH TO THEOLOGY

"Christianity is a faith to be proclaimed to all nations and cultures; yet as originally preached by Jesus and his disciples, it is very much in terms of its particular time and place. The development of doctrine is due partly to the need to translate what is expressed in terms of one cultural background into terms



intelligible to another; it is hardly relevant to the concerns of a first-century Roman or Illyrian, let alone to a twentieth-century Eskimo or Malaysian, that the Messiah or the Son of David has come into the world. But it is partly due to another fact. Men vary not only in their cultural backgrounds, but in extent of their intellectual development. The primitive mind thinks pictorially and symbolically; it lacks the capacity to reflect on its own processes, and is a stranger to the niceties of logic and scientific method. These begin to be possible when people follow the example of Socrates, and start looking for the exact definition of the terms that they are using. As a result of such reflection what was originally expressed in a dramatic and poetic way is progressively able to be stated in a more and more exact and rigorous manner, by use of the kind of technical terminology which is most familiar to us from the natural sciences." (96)

". . . And it is obvious enough that, except on a very inexact conception of the nature of 'logic', the doctrines of the Church cannot be logically deduced from statements of Scripture." (p 101)

## II. THE TRINITY (pp 103-108).

### CHAPTER 8: "Jurgen Moltmann" (Richard Bauckham)

#### I. ESCHATOLOGY

"The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set. . . . There is therefore only one real problem in Christian theology. . . : the problem of future. . ." (p 111).

#### II. THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST (pp 114-117)

#### III. THE CROSS AND THE CONCEPT OF GOD

". . . The cross is the salvific event of God's love because in it the love between the Father and the Son spans the gulf which separates godforsaken sinners from God. The trinitarian being of God includes this gulf within itself and thereby reaches sinners." (p 119)

". . . That event-character or historically of God's being which Barth finds in the event of God's self-revelation and therefore (because God corresponds to himself) in the immanent Trinity, Moltman locates simply in the event of Christ itself." (p 120)

#### IV. THE SUFFERING GOD (pp 121-124)

#### V. RESURRECTION AND THE SPIRIT (pp 124-129)

#### VI. THE TRINITARIAN BEING OF GOD (pp 129-131)



## CHAPTER 9: "Process Theology" (James D. Spiceland)

### I. SOME PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

"Whitehead's metaphysic asserts that the entire temporal process is a becoming, a transition from one event to another. These events are 'actual entities', and they begin to perish as soon as they come into being. An analogy with a motion picture may be helpful in grasping this." (p 136)

"The Whiteheadian term for this minute becoming is 'concrescence', i.e., becoming concrete." (p 136)

- Becoming
- Relatedness
- Incarnation (past experiences becoming incarnate in the present)
- Pre-consciousness/prereflective/pre-thematised (Whitehead, "Consciousness presupposes experience and not experience consciousness." p 138)

### II. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND DOCTRINAL FORMULATIONS (pp 139-148)

"All language, no matter how great the attempt at objectivity, is shaped by its own history, by the philosophical presuppositions, conceptual schemes, etc., of those that speak it." (p 146)

### III. THE TRINITY IN PROCESS THOUGHT

"The Trinity, like other doctrinal formulations of the christian faith, must be taken seriously [per Process Theology]. It is a doctrine which provides us with genuine insight into the divine reality. It is true that these Christians generally feel that some of the spirited debates of the past, which usually centered on logical precision and other linguistic details, were ill conceived. But the doctrinal formulation which emerged from early debates and councils is a genuine expression of the divine self-revelation to man. Those who treat it lightly do so at the cost of impoverishing their own understanding of the Faith.

"The view that the real point of this doctrine is its logical meaning is a wrong-headed one. Indeed, trinitarian thinking is not the kind of theorising which delights logical and philosophical minds. It is rather an effort to give conscious expression and make sense of a living reality, 'which is the inescapable fact, the absolute heart and center, of Christianity'. The point of the doctrine, then, as with all doctrines, is to express and emphasise certain aspects of the divine reality. It is intended to give significance to christian life and worship." (pp 148-149)

### IV. PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

The preconscious concept undermines true/false judgements of the resulting conscious expressions.



## CHAPTER 10: "Recent British Theology." (Brian Hebblethwaite)

"The most striking feature of recent British trinitarian theology—at least where England is concerned—is the frankness with which orthodox trinitarianism is being questioned or even rejected. This sceptical note is doctrinal criticism has also been sounded over the doctrine of the Incarnation—not surprisingly; for the two doctrines are, both historically and rationally, linked. Indeed the collapse of trinitarian theology is an inevitable consequence of the abandonment of incarnational christology." (158)

He notes professors Maurice Wiles and Geoffrey Lampe as examples. . . . "In discussing the work of Wiles and Lampe, we need to ask two main questions: in the **first** place, what are the reasons for their rejection of the trinitarian tradition? **Secondly**, how adequate are their non-trinitarian concepts of God? Or, put it the other way around, what is lost from christian theism, when we cease to think in trinitarian terms?

"[EXCURSUS:] The fact that these are the questions I wish to put to Wiles and Lampe shows that, to some extent, at least, I share their approach to theological problems. The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be established simply by citing authoritative texts, whether of Scripture or tradition. Its primary source is certainly divine revelation, but, as Leonard Hodgson saw, revelation is a matter of events, of divine actions in human history and in human lives. Revelation is not opposed to reason. Part of our response to God's self-revealing acts is precisely our rational reflection on the sense they make." (pp 160-161)

### FIRST QUESTION:

—problems of Method:

Wiles, The Remaking of Christian Doctrine, 'coherence' (the doctrine of the Trinity is incoherent, 'social analogy' in Lampe's mind=tritheism . . .) and 'economy' ("We are not to postulate more doctrine than the evidence demands. It was not necessary for the Fathers to erect the doctrinal superstructure that they did in the way they did.").

"We should remember that we are letting christian experience of Christ and the Spirit drive us on to postulate something strictly inaccessible to finite human minds, something about the infinite transcendent life of God in its fullness and richness of love given and love received, a mystery which we cannot and ought not to presume to be able to articulate precisely. . . . To my mind there are three such crucial features, which require us to resist the slide towards unitarianism. They are 1) recognition of the divinity of Christ. . . . ; 2) recognition that the Spirit of God in our hearts is not a matter of undifferentiated divine immanence. . . . ; 3) recognition that God is love, not just that he loves us, but that love—and that means love given and love received—is of the essence of his inner being." (p 164)

"immanence"---> "We have to think of the divine activity as an utterly different dimension of activity, working in and through creatures." (p 166)



SECOND QUESTION:

-casualties in a non-trinitarian theology:  
GOD IS LOVE---> "The argument should run: God is Love and therefore in himself relational, the perfection of love given and love received. The threefoldness of God cannot be inferred apart from the gifts of Christ and the Spirit. But might ther relateess of God have been inferred apart from the gifts of Christ and the Spirit, simply through reflection on the love of God? Well, I think it might, given the premise that God is love. Thast premise of relatioal thinking about God is itself a hard-won insight." (p 168)

CHRIST BECOMES ONE INSPIRED MAN AMONG OTHERS . . .

THE SPIRIT A UNIVERSAL DIVINE IMMANENCE WITHIN CREATION . . .

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FROM AUGUSTINE: LATER WORKS, "The Trinity" (Burnaby, John, ed., The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Edition, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1955)

"Our beliefs, with regard to matters with which we are not directly acquainted, e.g., the facts of the Gospel story, are grounded not on the mental picture which we form of them, and which is usually erroneous, but on general or abstract ideas. But our belief in the Trinity, our belief in God, cannot be based on any 'general idea.'" (p 37)

"And all love implies, besides itself, a loving subject and a loved object: three entities, one of which (love) is link between the other two." (p 38)

Relational aspect of the Trinity-sought to create a model for understanding the model, picture of the concept, the inner relatedness of God within himself. Problem of trying to squeeze a one-for-one correspondence of divine truth into human language

"We begin by considering the triad of love, lover, and beloved on the human level; for man is at least an image of God. But the human mind loves itself. Then subject and object coincide, and we have two entities instead of three, the mind and its love: two as related to one another, but together one as a spiritual reality." (p 56)

He's looking for an image of the Trinity in Creation specifically in Man. Thus he delineates self understanding and love and consciousness, all in an effort to resurrect the Triune Image of God in man.

"We're like statues who try to speak  
through our lips made of stone  
It looks impressive but were talking in Greek  
Pat Terry "Bent us  
like a drum" The Silence

**THE TRINITY**  
**Systems, Mental Constructs and Dealing With Reality**

by

Joseph Bustillos

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A Paper Submitted to Dr. Colin Brown  
of the School of Theology  
of Fuller Theological Seminary  
TH511: Systematic Theology I

May 16<sup>th</sup>

1985



## STATEMENT:

The Trinity is a doctrine pertaining to the Triune Being or Nature of the God of the Christian Scriptures that was set forth during the Patristic Period (100-300 A.D.) of the Church. It is my contention that this doctrine must be understood in terms of its origin in the Bible, specifically in the New Testament documents (that is regarding the New Testament's limited use of "precision systematic theology") and must be seen as a model or symbol of the Inner Being of God.

## INTRODUCTION

In opening this discussion regarding the doctrine of the Trinity two things need to be noted. The first is that apart from the testimony of the Bible, specifically the New Testament, there is no basis for proposing a doctrine of the Triune Nature of the Godhead. In Barth's theology, for example, nothing can be said at all about God apart from scripture and the first thing to be noted by Barth is the Triunity of God.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while some will differ with Barth's evaluation of Natural Theology, it is reasonable to state that the Scriptures are the sole source for our knowledge of the proposed Triune Nature of God. The second thing that must be recognized is that the doctrine of the Trinity owes its formulation to the Church's need to work out an understanding of the relationship between the doctrine of the Incarnation and the doctrine of Monotheism. Thus, while one

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Barth, Church Dogmatics, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I, pp. 295ff.

might say that Trinitarian theology's only basis is found in the scriptures, one cannot simply open to a text and say, "There it is in black and white." Hugo Meynell uses stronger language to promote the same point when he writes: "It is obvious enough that, except on a very inexact conception of the nature of 'logic', the doctrines of the Church cannot be logically deduced from statements of Scripture."<sup>2</sup> As a Protestant I find Meynell's "obvious" slant perhaps a bit too strong. The point is that in the New Testament there is a trajectory toward a Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead, but there is a great deal of development reflected when comparing what is hinted at in the New Testament with the type of statements that are found in the documents of the councils of Nicea and Constantinople (325 A.D. and 381 A.D., respectively).

#### INCARNATION AND MONOTHEISM

It appears that in the New Testament there are clear elements for a doctrine of the Trinity. There is a commitment to the unity of God as in the Old Testament, albeit with some modifications of the way in which God is thought to have been revealed; there is a development of a considerable christological tradition and there are some important suggestions of an understanding of the Holy Spirit as revealing the presence of God. However we do not have in precise terms a conscious discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity as an issue.<sup>3</sup>

One cannot discuss the Trinity without also discussing the

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<sup>2</sup>Hugo Meynell, "Bernard Lonergan," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), p. 101.

<sup>3</sup>Bruce N. Kaye, "The New Testament," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), pp. 22-23.

doctrine of the Incarnation. The Incarnation seems to be with us from the moment we first turn to the pages of the New Testament in the Nativity Narrative of Matthew's gospel.

"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:20b-23)

Yet before I go off and begin citing various passages that seem to reflect the divine nature in Christ ("See, it's right there in black and white") I need to be aware of the significance that the terms had for the original first century (in this case, Jewish) hearers and thus attempt to suppress for a moment my twentieth century bias with its fully developed christology and homogenized monotheism. The titles addressed to Jesus of Nazareth, for example, may seem to have significant value to us in so far as they "reveal" Jesus' divinity, but to those who lived prior to the council of Nicea their significance may have had nothing to do with Eternal Realities but with a hope and a belief in a man of whom it was said would come some day and set them free. This aspect of the question must not be taken too lightly. I must face the reality that in addressing the question of the Incarnation of God in Christ (and the doctrine of the Trinity) I am attempting to put into precise rational words what the biblical writers left in non-technical pictorial language.<sup>4</sup> Hugo

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<sup>4</sup>That the Bible is written in non-technical pictorial

model of the wisdom of  
the G. Q. and a not a  
photograph of a family portrait  
of the Father, Son & Holy Ghost.

Meynell writes in defense of the obvious gap between the concepts presented by the Church Fathers and the language used by the Biblical writers:

The development of doctrine is due partly to the need to translate what is expressed in terms of one cultural background into terms intelligible to another. . . . But it is partly due to another fact. Men vary not only in their cultural backgrounds, but in extent of their intellectual development. The primitive mind thinks pictorially and symbolically; it lacks the capacity to reflect on its own processes, and is a stranger to the niceties of logic and scientific method. These begin to be possible when people follow the example of Socrates, and start looking for the exact definition of the terms that they are using. As a result of such reflection what was originally expressed in a dramatic and poetic way is progressively able to be stated in a more and more exact and rigorous manner, by use of the kind of technical terminology which is most familiar to us from the natural sciences.<sup>5</sup>

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language is certainly a part of a larger discussion than can be adequately addressed here (one then wonders about the logic of addressing the question of the Trinity . . .). It's not even a question of precision or style but one of the ever elusive intent. An interesting book dealing with the literary nature of the Scriptures is: Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981).

<sup>5</sup>Meynell, p. 96.

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**THE TRINITY**  
**Scriptures, Structures and Limits**

**by**

**Joseph B. Bustillos**

I have two contentions regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. The first is that the doctrine of the Trinity is inextricably tied to the revelation of God given in the scriptures. That is, it was formulated after the closing of the Canon of Scripture in order to bring an understanding to how the doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Christ and the monotheistic nature of God's being, which are both confessed to by the Biblical writers, work together. The second contention is that because of the literary nature of the scriptures, that is the intent of the original authors and the scope or focus of their concerns, any statement made in reference to the Trinity must be made in a limited fashion as a "model" looking towards aiding our understanding of the Nature of the Triune God of the Christian scriptures. These two contention work together in somewhat of a circular fashion.

## THE TRINITY AND SCRIPTURE

Our beliefs, with regard to matters with which we are not directly acquainted, e.g., the facts of the Gospel story, are grounded not on the mental picture which we form of them, and which is usually erroneous, but on general or abstract ideas. But our belief in the Trinity, our belief in God, cannot be based on any "general idea."<sup>1</sup>

That there is a relationship between the concept of the Trinity and the Canon of Scripture should be obvious, that the relationship is exclusive is not so obvious. I find the basis for such an exclusive relationship between scripture and the Trinity in the inability of the Natural or General Revelation to produce an example of Trinity in Nature. Try as they might, the Church Fathers, particularly Tertullian and Augustine, successfully illustrate "three-ness" or "one-ness" but not "one-in-three-ness and simultaneously three-in-one-ness."<sup>2</sup> Thus, we are left with just the testimony of Scripture. To be fair to Tertullian and those that followed, they were working with the premise that the Nature of God's Being should be found imprinted in the Nature of Creation, Vestigia Trinitatis. Where they made a mistake, I think, is in the type of examples that they looked

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<sup>1</sup>Augustine: Later Works, "The Trinity," Library of Christian Classics: Ichthus Edition, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>Augustine, pp. 38ff and Class notes: Dr. Colin Brown, Systematic Theology I, Fuller Theological Seminary, May 16, 1985.

for.<sup>3</sup>

Working from his Dialectical heritage, Barth began his theology along the opposite philosophic premise that if God is revealed at all then he must be a Trinity because his Otherness would restrict him from disclosing himself if he were "non-trinitarian."<sup>4</sup> Barth's model runs parallel to his three-fold understanding of the Word of God. Because of the revelation of God in Scripture (The existence of the Word of God in the light of God's Otherness) he views the Trinity as "Revealed, Revelation and Revealedness."<sup>5</sup> In some ways this model tends to echo Augustine's "Love, Lover and Beloved."<sup>6</sup>

The point of all this is that regardless of one's perspective, there would be no Trinity or basis for a trinitarian understanding of the Nature of God without first recognizing that its foundation is in the revelation of God found in the scriptures. But what is this revelation of God? In the first

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<sup>3</sup>One of the concepts that Augustine develops is based on 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:16; he sees the Trinity as "Love, Lover and Beloved." I feel that up to this point Augustine presents some real insight into the Nature of God. There is a Subject/Object nature to Love that requires relationship or communion. So that for God to be love, he must also be in communion with the Object of his Love, and thus it follows that there is a plurality, a trinity to God. Augustine's mistake is that he then attempts to identify the "Love, Lover & Beloved," attempting to discern a one-for-one correspondence between the Trinity and the "Love, Lover, Beloved" analogy. He goes from the concept of communion within the Godhead (something that is immanent in God) to dividing God into three roles (something functional, "economic"), and the image gets lost in a pile of disjointed metaphors. Augustine, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>Carl Barth, Church Dogmatics, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I, pp. 297ff.

<sup>5</sup>Barth, p. 295.

<sup>6</sup>Augustine, p. 56.

instance it is not, "Thus sayeth the Lord God, 'I am Trinity, and you shall worship as such.'" Unfortunately there are no passages in Scripture that say that. Thus, while Augustine would rather we didn't base our understanding of the Trinity on a "general idea," that is exactly what we have in scripture.

This leads us to the question, "Why the Trinity at all? Why not monarchianism or modalism, et al?" The center of the controversy is to be found in ones understanding of Christology, specifically the Incarnation of God in Christ.

## THE INCARNATION

It appears that in the New Testament there are clear elements for a doctrine of the Trinity. There is a commitment to the unity of God as in the Old Testament, albeit with some modifications of the way in which God is thought to have been revealed; there is a development of a considerable christological tradition and there are some important suggestions of an understanding of the Holy Spirit as revealing the presence of God. However we do not have in precise terms a conscious discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity as an issue.

One cannot discuss the Trinity without also discussing the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Incarnation seems to be with us from the moment we first turn to the pages of the New Testament in the Nativity Narrative of Matthew's gospel.

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<sup>7</sup>Bruce N. Kaye, "The New Testament," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), pp. 22-23.



"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:20b-23)

Yet before I go off and begin citing various passages that seem to reflect the full divine nature of Christ ("See, it's right there in black and white, 'Thus sayeth the Lord God . . .") I need to acknowledge the significance that the terms may have had for the original first century (in this case, Jewish) hearers and thus attempt to suppress for a moment my twentieth century bias with its fully developed christology and homogenized monotheism.

The titles addressed to Jesus of Nazareth, for example, may seem to have significant value to us in so far as they "reveal" Jesus' divinity, but to those who lived prior to the council of Nicea their significance may have had nothing to do with Eternal Realities but with a hope and a belief in a man of whom it was said would come some day and set them free.<sup>8</sup> This aspect of the question must not be taken too lightly. I must face the reality that in addressing the question of the Incarnation of God in Christ (and the doctrine of the Trinity) I am attempting to put into precise rational words what the biblical writers left in

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<sup>8</sup>Further reading on Christology and the titles for Christ see: C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 228-285; Peter Ellis, Matthew: His Mind and His Message (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974), pp. 101-112; Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1981), pp. 235-407.

non-technical pictorial language.<sup>9</sup> Hugo Meynell writes in defense of the obvious gap between the concepts presented by the Church Fathers and the language used by the Biblical writers as being brought about by the need to adapt Christianity to other cultures and, more importantly, the development of Socratic logic and reflection:

As a result of such reflection what was originally expressed in a dramatic and poetic ways is progressively able to be stated in a more and more exact and rigorous manner, by use of the kind of technical terminology which is most familiar to us from the natural sciences.<sup>10</sup>

#### CHRISTOLOGY AND THE EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Rather than making a brief survey of the various texts of scripture that are normally cited to establish Christ's divinity (and therefore the Trinity), I would like to turn to an article by Christopher B. Kaiser entitled "The Discernment of Triunity."<sup>11</sup> In this article he develops a Christology that is based on the testimony of scripture and the "empirical-

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<sup>9</sup>That the Bible is written in non-technical pictorial language is certainly part of a larger discussion than can be adequately addressed here (one then wonders about the logic of addressing the question of the Trinity . . .). It's not even a question of precision or style but one of the ever elusive intent. An interesting book dealing with the literary nature of the Scriptures is: Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1981).

<sup>10</sup>Hugo Meynell, "Bernard Lonergan," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), p. 96.

<sup>11</sup>Christopher B. Kaiser, "The Discernment of Triunity," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), pp. 27-41.

phenomenological" approach. His application of this approach appeals to me because, on the one hand, he's using a method that reflects a development made in religious studies over the last half century and, on the other hand, he's intelligently dealing with the written record of scripture. Briefly, the empirical-phenomenological approach involves establishing on an empirical "grounding" (historically verifiable event) an encounter with the Holy (a numinous-sacred presence).<sup>12</sup> The challenge for Kaiser is that, among other things, he must establish that the numinous-encounter in Jesus was definitive of Jesus' life-time existence (and thus establish a trinitarian model as opposed to the "adoption" or "inspiration" explanations for the phenomenon).

After searching for the proper grounding of his thesis, Kaiser bases his findings on the prayer/personal relationship between the Father and the Son and upon the miraculous phenomenon surrounding Jesus' ministry.

I find that the prayer life of Jesus, as observed by the disciples and the early Church, is a suitable empirical basis for the apostolic discernment of triunity and that it is possible to analyze the rather complex nature of this discernment into the following elements (in spite of the fact that they are organically inter-related, they are logically distinct):

- (1) The presence of God discerned in Jesus

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<sup>12</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). Kaiser's face-lift of mysterium tremendum et fascinans is a heartwarming reminder of one of the classes that I took as a Religious Studies major at Loyola Marymount University. Ah . . . nothing like applying my personal (Reformational) encounter with Christ to the old Jesuit musings about the Holy. Class notes: Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.



- (miracles, prophetic teachings, etc.).
- (2) This presence discerned to be continual and irrevocable (everyday life, suffering, death).
  - (3) This presence discerned to be immediate and 'personal' (revision of law, healing on Sabbath, forgiving sins); together with (2) implies 'Incarnation', 'God with us'.
  - (4) This presence discerned in continual conjunction with the distinct personal presence of God-the-Father (prayers of Jesus, 'responses' of the Father); implies two distinct divine 'persons'.
  - (5) These two divine presences discerned to be reciprocally related, 'coinherent' (intimacy of prayer, Jesus' use of 'Abba'); implies two 'persons' in one God (John 14:11, 10:30).
  - (6) Discernment of these divine presences discerned to be due to divine 'inspiration', presence of Holy Spirit in the Church itself (1 Cor 12:3).
  - (7) Presence of the Spirit discerned to be continual, immediate, and intimately related to apprehension of God as 'Father' and Jesus as his 'Son' (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6); implies three, and only three, 'coinhering', divine persons, one God."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, although I've gone about it in a round-about way, we are left with an understanding that the doctrine of the Trinity is inextricably tied to the revelation of God given in the scriptures.

## STRUCTURES AND LIMITS

To repeat my second contention: because of the literary nature of the scriptures, that is the intent of the original authors and the scope or focus of their concerns, any statement made in reference to the Trinity must be made in a limited fashion as a "model" looking towards aiding our understanding of

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<sup>13</sup>Kaiser, p. 37.

the Nature of the Triune God of the Christian scriptures.

To the systematic or logical mind a preliminary reading of the Scriptures should reveal a naggingly consistent trajectory towards open-endedness in terms of definitive doctrinal statements. Undaunted, such a mind might respond that this is because people today are asking different questions than they were during the Apostolic period. This is a good response. It is a far better response than the one made by those that completely ignore the discrepancy and either go about answering questions that no one is asking or roto-tilling the scriptural record to fight their vision of Reality. But the question still remains for both of them: Why is there such an Open-endedness to Scripture? Just about every major doctrine has some elements of Open-endedness in it; whether it be the doctrine of Election, or the Sovereignty of God, or the Inspiration of the Scriptures, or Kingdom of Heaven/God, or the Triune Nature of the Godhead. This question points us in two directions. The first is the nature of structures and the second, which is very closely related to the first, is the nature of our "knowing" things.

There seems to be a nasty tendency among Christian to see structures as Realities and not Utilities. This tendency can be seen from Augustine on down the line, and is an obvious throw back to the Platonic notion that beyond all phenomenon is the Perfect/Ideal Reality. Thus, Christians often see the doctrine (or doctrinal statement) as the Reality and the phenomenon as the Image. All seems well and good until our beloved Open-endedness comes along and presents an overwhelming number of exceptions to

our newly devised rules, forcing us, we think, to either give up our Reality (the doctrine) or the phenomenon (the Image). This would not be a dilemma if we understood that structure is a construct of our own mind, devised to aid our understanding of the corresponding Reality. This is why I use the word "model" when referring to the doctrine of the Trinity. Because there is no scripture that explicitly declares, "Behold, I am Trinity, and I am Trinity in this manner . . ."; because the doctrine is a synthesis of the foundational Old Testament Monotheism and the heavenly vision of God incarnate in Christ, it is something that our minds have put together to aid us in understanding how God could be one and at the same time three.

The second direction is in terms of how we "know" things. As was once pointed out in class, our knowledge is a collection of approximations. "We are used to giving objective absolute certainties on things, but life isn't that way; it presents good approximations but not objective absolute certainties."<sup>14</sup> Again, in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, we have a model of the Inner Being of the Godhead and not a photograph or family portrait of the Father, Son & Holy Ghost. We live with this sort of approximation in every area of our lives and so it should not come as a surprise that,

Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1st Corinthians 13:12, 13).

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<sup>14</sup>Class notes: Dr. Colin Brown, Systematic Theology I, Fuller Theological Seminary, April 11, 1985.



It's a typical day for the man of steel  
a little bit happy and little bit sad  
That seems like a reasonable way to feel  
for a man in a world gone mad . . .

'Cause there's a poor man begging for a crust of bread  
on a hard mean street downtown  
And there's a rich woman sewing with golden thread  
on the train of her wedding gown

And the man of steel has a tear in his eye for the homeless one  
And the man of steel has a lump in his throat for the  
owner of love  
And the man of steel has hope in his heart for anyone  
who will see both sides and still decide to carry on . . .

And the man of steel has hope in his heart for anyone  
Who will sing a clear and truthful song  
Who can hear a lie and still be strong  
Who can see both sides and still decide to carry on<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Pat Terry, "Man of Steel," The Silence (Waco, Texas: Word Music, 1984).

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THE TRINITY  
Systems, Mental Constructs and Dealing With Reality

by

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TH511: Systematic Theology I

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## STATEMENT:

The Trinity is a doctrine pertaining to the Triune Being or Nature of the God of the Christian Scriptures that was set forth during the Patristic Period (100-300 A.D.) of the Church. It is my contention that this doctrine must be understood in terms of its origin in the Bible, specifically in the New Testament documents (that is regarding the limited scope of the New Testament's "theologically systematic precision") and must be seen as a model or symbol of the Inner Being of God.

## INTRODUCTION

It appears that in the New Testament there are clear elements for a doctrine of the Trinity. There is a commitment to the unity of God as in the Old Testament, albeit with some modifications of the way in which God is thought to have been revealed; there is a development of a considerable christological tradition and there are some important suggestions of an understanding of the Holy Spirit as revealing the presence of God. However we do not have in precise terms a conscious discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity as an issue.<sup>1</sup>

In opening this discussion regarding the doctrine of the Trinity two things need to be noted. The first is that apart from the testimony of the Bible, specifically the New Testament, there is no basis for proposing a doctrine of the Triune Nature of the Godhead. In Barth's theology, for example, nothing can be said at all about God apart from scripture and the first thing to

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce N. Kaye, "The New Testament," in Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland, eds., One God in Trinity (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), pp. 22-23.

be noted is the Triunity of God.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while some will differ with Barth's evaluation of Natural Theology, it is reasonable to state that the Scriptures are the sole source for our knowledge of the proposed Triune Nature of God. The second thing that must be discussed is what the New Testament does and does not say regarding the proposed Triune Nature of God. As was suggested in the above quotation <sup>from</sup> ~~of~~ Bruce Kaye, we have elements of the Trinity in the New Testament but there is a great deal of development reflected when comparing these "elements" with the type of statements that are found in the documents of the councils of Nicea and Constantinople (325 A.D and 381 A.D., respectively).

#### THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Biblical Basis only/essly

A) The Trinity and the New Testament- no NT, no Trinity.

B) NT testimony:

- 1) Monotheism
- 2) Christology
- 3) The Holy Spirit

#### BIBLICAL LANGUAGE & THE NATURE OF THE SCRIPTURES

non-technical [ QUOTE, notes p 5]

open-endedness (seed-idea to be developed but with Scripture as the sole evidence there's definitely a

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<sup>2</sup>Carl Barth, Church Dogmatics, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I, pp. 295ff.

limity to the construct to be erected).

TRINITY AS MODEL OR SYMBOL:

DEFINITIONS

PROBLEMS

REPLIES

CONCLUSIONS